



## WORD OF THE TEACHER

*Gift is an assignment.  
It should be fulfilled despite any  
obstacles.*

*Yevgeny Baratynsky*

In the semidarkness of the canvas not very sharply stands out the face of a woman and sparkles a slightly tense and attentive look of deep and sad eyes, as if following you.

The branches of a tree fantastically grow through familiar objects depicted in the standing near by still-life. They move, stream, permeate everything and enshroud the objects with some unspeakable mystery. The luminescence of the extraordinary in the usual. And here are large graphic sheets to illustrate the Jewish folk songs. They are fairytale and poetic. Through the kind smile of love and sympathy is seen hidden sadness as natural as breath itself. Leonidov's words about Mikhoels come to my memory: "... and only sadness – Jewish, eternal".

Before me lay the works by Itella Mastbaum, the artist whom I have known for a long time and as I hope – well. All these works are marked with the feeling of sincerity, which is the intrinsic feature of all the works created by her. For many years since the time Itella was at college yet I have been keeping an eye on her creative activity and I am satisfied to mark in her the qualities inherent only in serious artists – belief in herself, doubt in one's strength and love for what she does in art.

It was yet when she studied under my guidance that I was attracted by such qualities of hers as thoughtfulness, independence of viewpoints combined with trust in and sensitiveness to another artist's opinion.

I. Mastbaum is a versatile artist. She works in the field of painting where the predominant genres are still-life and portrait, in easel painting and book graphic art as well as in theatre.

She has illustrated many works by Jewish writers issued by publishing houses "Sovetsky Pisatel (Soviet Writer)", "Malysh (Toddler)" and others, also in the magazine "Sovetish Heimland" where many of her works and an article on her creative endeavour were published.

The artist has created a number of lithographs after the motifs of Jewish Folk Songs and Fairytales; she has also created scenery and costumes for theatrical productions of Fairytales by Anderson, Swartz, Drutze and others.

She also was engaged in ceramics, wrote a play, Jewish Fairytales, taught in a children's art studio continuing the business of her father who was a modest but confirmed artist, a man of

high personal qualities whose influence on Itella leaves no doubt. When speaking of the scope of the artist's interests I would like to mark that it is really a wide range of interests but not incoherence. In each genre of art she is distinguished by purposefulness, persistence, fruitful stubbornness in pursuing the goal.

The council of playwrights and the publishing house "Sovetish Heimland" in Moscow held Mastbaum's personal exhibitions which showed that her works are very figurative, poetic and highly imaginative.

Frequent trips about the country especially about the North could not but enrich her provide her with new impressions and observations. I. Mastbaum is an artist with her own world, her own tonality. It is by this inner tonality, by the melody that the genuine painter is recognized and not by some technique or outward signs.

What I especially appreciate in her creative activity is her independence of viewpoints, absence of borrowing or rip-off. The artist realizes that somebody else's imagination may inhibit her own one.

It should also be said that national traditions (themes, figurative forms) reveal themselves in her works. Perhaps, I should have begun with this.

When I think about Itella Mastbaum I think about her poetry, her lyrical susceptibility, fantasy and emotionality.

Poetry is the medium for her in which she lives. The many works I have seen reveal the desire to be understood but not to be pleasant. She does not fawn on the viewers. It often happens that a person has learned to speak but he has not got anything to say. I. Mastbaum has got quite a lot to say.

As a painter I cannot help calling attention to the colourism of her works. It is, no doubt, one of the assets of her works.

And there is another feature which attracts in Itella's works – it is the musicality of her works. She is a person who loves and feels music. In the boundless world of music she immediately catches national melodies. They are close to her heart and by invisible threads they are connected with what she creates. It stands to reason that the connection is mediate.

What I have written about Itella Mastbaum is not a critical article on her creative endeavour. I did not even pursue such a task. That's why I shall keep from criticizing the artist's works. I hope criticism is pending yet. She has covered a certain distance of inner maturing. And we know what it means, how much toil, mortification and joy lies behind it.

It is difficult to become an artist, it is difficult to be such and it is still more difficult to remain it. But I. Mastbaum is under way.

For an artist it is not the position in which he finds himself that matters but the direction in which he moves. I believe Itella Mastbaum is on the right way in her creative activity. She can respect herself as she has always painted only what she wanted and loved and she never tried to out do anyone.

The future has in store for her hard but gratifying work, new exhibitions.

May those who visit them share with the author her joys and doubts, her hopes.

Itella Mastbaum is an artist full of sincerity and devotion to art and I only hope that her further life may only enable her to reveal her talent to the hilt in creative endeavour.

It would be only too fair.

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